Appendix D. Guidelines for an Online Vital Records System

Part of 2001 Wisconsin Act 16 required the Department of Health and Family Services to appoint a committee to develop guidelines for an online, electronic filing system for Wisconsin's vital records. The committee will develop an outline of a proposal for an electronic Vital Records System by July 1, 2002, and will report findings and recommendations to the Legislature by January 1, 2003. These guidelines will be used in the preparation of the Committee's final report.

Automation of the Wisconsin vital records registration and statistics system will improve services to the public, provide efficiencies for state and local governments, comply with national standards for the integrity of health statistics data collection, and provide assurance that Wisconsin vital records are stored and preserved for use by future generations.

Government agencies (local registers of deeds, county clerks, clerks of court, coroners and medical examiners, National Center for Health Statistics, Social Security Administration and other Wisconsin agencies), vital records business partners (funeral directors, birthing hospitals and midwives), and other vital records stakeholders (physicians, genealogists and users of health statistical data) concur that an automated system for the registration and preservation of Wisconsin vital record events, including births, deaths, marriages, and divorces, should provide for:

Privacy and Security:	The system must prevent unauthorized access to confidential, sensitive, and personally identifying information in all its functions: data entry and amendment, data transmission and storage, record access, copy creation and issuance, and record storage.
Flexibility:	The system must meet the current and future needs of the Wisconsin Vital Records Office and the needs of vital records business partner stakeholders, customers, and other users of vital records.
Productivity:	The system must maximize efficiency by eliminating duplicate work and delays, by making communication easier, by ensuring data integrity, and by automating repetitive and manual tasks with the appropriate use of technology.

The following system features, identified by their respective categories for meeting privacy, flexibility, and productivity standards, will address current and future needs for an automated Wisconsin vital record filing and statistics system.

Privacy and Security:

1. Meet current industry requirements for security that are consistent throughout all means of access, through:

    - User verification,

- Activity recording,
- Data security,
- Central control of printing functions,
- Physical security.

The system should incorporate appropriate technology and processes that prevent inappropriate and unauthorized access to vital records information and copies during electronic and manual access. It should also allow users and activities to be monitored to assure the appropriate use of the system.

2. Match death records to birth records. By automatically cross-matching death records to birth records, the system will prevent the identities of deceased persons from being stolen. It will also decrease the amount of manual work currently required to cross-match birth and death records for statistical research.

3. Allow for differing levels of access by users. The system must allow each user to access information required to perform his or her specific vital records functions while preventing access to records and information to which the user is not legally entitled.

Flexibility:

1. Allow for implementation in stages. The system will be implemented in phases over time. The vital records program must continue to function before and during the implementation of each phase.

2. Allow access using various levels of technology. Since users of the system will have differing access to technology, the system must allow records to be filed and accessed both manually and electronically.

3. Integrate with existing systems of vital records offices, business partners, and government agencies. Many vital records offices and business partners have existing electronic systems that perform functions that may not be included in the new system. The system should integrate appropriately and cost-effectively with other data systems to facilitate the Department's mission to monitor and analyze health, social and demographic data and to allow for easier implementation and greater functionality.

4. Allow for future upgrades to incorporate advances in software and hardware. The system should allow improvements in technology to be incorporated after implementation in a cost-effective manner. Input should be periodically collected from users of the system to assist in the planning and implementation of upgrades.

5. Allow policy revisions and statute changes to be easily incorporated into the system. As laws and policies change, the system must allow modifications to be made quickly and cost-effectively.

6. Allow multiple users to submit data for a single record separately. Multiple persons may be required to submit data for a single certificate. The system should allow data to be submitted separately by each filer, then integrated into one record.

7. Allow users to manually enter data or override electronic submission. The system should allow certain users to manually file vital records and supersede electronically filed records in order to correct errors and ensure data integrity.

Productivity:

1. Allow Local Registrars to remain the point-of-filing for vital records in order to meet workload demands and provide timely service to customers.

2. Allow electronic submission of records, amendments, and requests to prevent duplicate data entry and errors and to improve the timeliness of service to customers by eliminating mailing. The current paper-intensive filing and amendment procedures require information to be typed many times into separate systems. Electronic submission will prevent duplicate data entry, keying errors, and discrepancies and will eliminate the time required to send certificates, queries, and changes through the mail.

3. Incorporate online data edits and default field values to decrease errors. Correcting errors prior to filing a record can be difficult and time-consuming. Online data edits and default field values will prevent common errors, thereby reducing the number of unacceptable records and the additional delays and work required to correct errors.

4. Facilitate communication with data submitters to automate the query process and provide online training. Incorporating online communication will decrease the time required to correct a record and will prevent errors by easily allowing data submitters to ask questions prior to submission. Online training will help ensure that all users have had adequate instruction in system use and will decrease the amount of in-person training required during implementation.

5. Create and disseminate reports to track the status of incomplete records, increase timeliness, and improve data quality. The creation of standard and custom reports will allow users to ensure that records have been filed completely and correctly, thereby decreasing delays and need for follow-up.

6. Allow data submission during non-business hours. The system should be available for records to be filed during the hours when vital records offices are closed.

7. Improve the ability to locate specific records with limited information by automating search functions. Current manual and electronic systems have a limited ability to locate a specific record without exact information. The new system should allow records to be located with limited information, which will improve the services we provide to customers and law enforcement.

8. Adequate maintenance, training, and assistance must be provided to users to ensure the system is available to meet their needs. The system must also incorporate adequate and appropriate disaster recovery and data retrieval processes and technology to allow data to be recovered and to assure continued functionality if a system failure or disaster should occur. The system must allow critical vital records functions to continue off-site if the main system location is unavailable.

9. Contractual provisions should be made if the system is purchased from a vendor to ensure continued functionality. The vendor must sign a service level agreement with monetary penalties for non-performance, must provide system training and/or a users group, and guarantee the availability of the source code if the vendor goes out of business.